

- Never thaw food on the counter or let it sit out of the refrigerator for more than two hours.
- Use refrigerated ground meat and patties within two days. Use frozen meat and patties in three or four months.
- Wash hands, utensils and work areas with hot, soapy water after contact with raw meat and meat patties.
- Follow rules of personal hygiene, especially after bathroom use or after diapering infants.
- Cook meat and patties until the center is gray or brown. Juices should run clear with no trace of pink. Ground beef should be cooked so that the internal temperature is at least 160°F. Use an “instant-read” thermometer to check temperatures. It is designed to be used toward the end of the cooking time and registers a temperature in about 15 seconds.
- When eating out, send back any meat, poultry or fish product that does not appear thoroughly cooked.
- Serve cooked food with clean plates and utensils.
- Make sure that food cooked in the microwave is cooked thoroughly.

For more information . . .

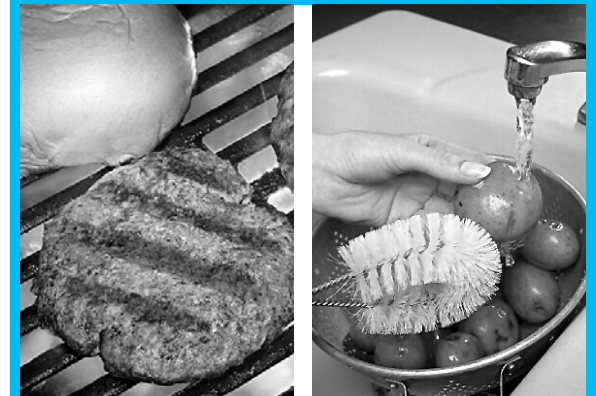
Contact the
WVDA Meat and Poultry Inspection Division
 1900 Kanawha Blvd., East, Charleston, WV
 25305-0179; (304) 558-2207.



E. coli

0157:H7

What you need to know



West Virginia Department of
West Virginia
 Department of Agriculture
Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner
 animal - plant - environment
AGRICULTURE

What is E. coli 0157:H7?

Escherichia coli 0157:H7 is a dangerous strain of E. coli bacteria, which normally live in the intestinal tracts of animals and humans.

It was first recognized as a human pathogen in 1982 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after an outbreak in Oregon and Michigan. It can be transferred from animal to animal, animal to human, food to human and person to person through close contact.

What are the effects of an E. coli 0157:H7 infection?

After the bacteria incubates between 12 and 60 hours, the illness usually lasts from 4 to 10 days. Symptoms include severe abdominal cramps, followed by watery diarrhea that often becomes bloody. Victims may also suffer vomiting and nausea, accompanied by low-grade fever.

It's particularly dangerous for children and the elderly, who may develop severe complications. Children may develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which can cause kidney failure, brain damage, strokes and seizures. The elderly may encounter thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP), which can cause strokes.

What is being done to protect consumers from future E. coli 0157:H7 outbreaks?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is immersed in research. There are efforts to develop a vaccine to help keep food

animals from harboring the bacteria in their systems. Detection methods being developed will help keep bacteria out of meat plants — stringent time and temperature controls in meat processing plants have already begun.

All raw meat products are required to have safe handling instructions on the package to educate consumers. Follow the instructions to protect your family from meat-borne diseases.

What about efforts in West Virginia?

West Virginians are lucky. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) maintains a Meat and Poultry Inspection Program that's second to none in the nation — it's rated by USDA as one of the best. In our slaughterhouses, which are continuously inspected by inspectors, we have a zero tolerance policy. No milk, ingested foods or fecal contamination is tolerated, and we will not allow processors to wash off contaminants. They must trim and discard those areas.

Nor do we allow any kind of meat or processed product to be reconditioned. Our inspectors conduct a preslaughter checkup and continuously inspect each carcass in at least 10 different phases. It's far more than a "sight and smell" operation. Any contamination simply leads to the condemnation of the affected product in meat establishments. Strict processing inspection based on scientific research is carried out daily to assure that no eat contaminated with any potentially harmful bacteria can leave the packing plant.

What can be done to prevent E. coli infection?

Under-cooked hamburger and roast beef are responsible for the majority of foodborne outbreaks since 1982, but raw milk, improperly processed cider, contaminated water and mayonnaise and vegetables grown in cow manure have also been identified as food sources of E. coli 0157:H7. To protect yourself and your family from a potential infection, you should handle food safely. It's important to know that freezing does not kill E. coli 0157:H7.

The following safe food handling practices are the best ways to help prevent foodborne illnesses:

- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Never drink raw milk. Use pasteurized milk.
- Quickly freeze or refrigerate perishable foods after shopping.



Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.